"Lefts" Praised Thalheimer's Banned Work On Dialectics

(In a recent issue of the Age we called attention to the curious action of the English Left Book Club in abruptly withdrawing their recommendation of August Thalheimer's "Introduction to Dialectical Materialism" as an Additional Book for May and in cancelling the publication of their edition of this work. That this was done in response to pressure from official communist sources because of Thalheimer's oppositional views, is obvious enough. It is therefore interesting to note the laudatory review that the Left Book Club News included in its March 1937 issue. This review we present below in full.—The Editor.)

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"This book," says Thalheimer, "is not meant for casual spectators; nor is it meant for those who are or wish to be academic philosophers." That note sets the key in which a book on dialectical materialism ought to be written. For the whole science of dialectical thinking offers us not so much an abstract theory of the universe, as "a tool for practical and conscious participants in the class struggle to-day." Many others will want to read this book in order to find out what is the underlying philosophy, in the technical sense of the word, of the Marxist movement. Thalheimer writes specially for readers who have no special philosophical training but who are connected with the labour movement; for this very reason, no better introduction to Dialectical Materialism could be put into the hands of anyone. Its extreme clarity and simplicity are achieved without falsification.

While the book is of course in no sense a complete study, it is an excellent **beginning** to the study of dialectics. The student will have nothing to unlearn as he proceeds to more elaborate works, while the active political worker without Marxist training will get at once a new mental equipment to aid him in the day to day struggle. A little later will come far more complete and elaborate works "A Text-Book of Marxist Philosophy" (a co-operative work in use in Moscow) and Professor Levy's "Dialectical Materialism."

The book begins with a useful study of religion and the modern world view. Thalheimer treats this part of the subject historically and has a good deal to say on Indian religion. As it is generally believed that Indian philosophy is purely idealistic, in the technical sense, this new point of view, with the very illuminating relation of Indian religion to Indian social conditions, will be of interest. In a later chapter Chinese religion and philosophy are discussed. This unusual feature of the book is because Thalheimer's original aim was to explain Dialectical Materialism to the Eastern as well as to the Western mind. It adds to rather than detracts from it value.

Copies of August Thalheimer's "Introduction to Dialectical Materialism" may be obtained from the Workers Age Bookshop, 131 W. 33rd St., New York City at $1.50 each, for two weeks only.

In contrast to the religious approach to life, Greek materialism and philosophy are next considered. This is probably the most useful approach to any study of philosophy, since there is little in modern thought that does not find its origin in ancient Greece. It is through Plato and Aristotle that Thalheimer introduces us to the meaning of dialectic, a term which should baffle no one after reading this valuable chapter and its sequel, the chapter on Hegel himself. To deal with Hegel, Feuerbach and the French materialists in one chapter would be somewhat of a feat, but Thalheimer proceeds to expand his system from this point onwards. First, in Chapter VIII comes an explanation of how the new materialism grows out of and transcends the older mechanistic materialism which philosophers have long discarded. There follows a chapter on the theory of knowledge, which is absolutely fundamental, and will surprise those who have supposed that Dialectical Materialism denies the existence and function of mind. In the tenth and eleventh chapter we come to the heart of the book, the exposition of Marxian Dialectics: the law of the permeation of opposites, the Law of negation, the law of the transformation of quality into quantity and of quantity into quality. Those who have long hesitated to examine these questions, expecting to find unfathomable mysteries, will find, not mystery, but plain common-sense.

The remaining chapters are concerned with philosophy and history, the relation, that is to say, of theory to politics and social practice. From this we gain an altogether new insight into the profound significance of class struggle, and see that it is not in the least the impatient appeal to hate and violence which it is often represented to be.

A final chapter deals with Pragmatism and with certain other modern philosophical tendencies in a tantalisingly brief fashion which, however, should only serve to whet our appetite for a fuller treatment. An introduction to Dialectical Materialism which leaves us with this feeling has done its work well.